

Fifteen Minutes

by august

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Summary: A disaster story. Written before 'Year of Hell', really!

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> <p> Startrek copyrighted by Paramount, or Viacom or someone who's got trizillions of dollars, and who could squash me like a bug. The lyrics used within the story are from a song called Sonnet by a fantastic band, The Verve.

Rated R, just to be safe.

>

>
_ My friend and me, looking through her red box of memories

> Faded I'm sure, but love seems to stick in your veins, you know

—

>

Amongst the debris, and the smoke, and the devastation, it was the screams of the survivors that kept us going. The attack had come so quickly, and so absolutely, that we didn't even register what had happened before the reports started coming through.

One minute we were flying through space, joking about boredom -- the next minute there was a wave of explosions and a gush of heat that turned my cheeks red. It knocked us all off our feet, but it was a good ten seconds before things started going wrong.

But boy, did they go wrong.

Things started falling, the deck above us seemed to collapse in on us, people fell from above -- we were covered in dust, and metal and computers. The room was filled with smoke and the red alert klaxons were singing to the stars.

It took me another five seconds to fully register what had happened. And then, all of a sudden the bridge burst into activity. All around me everyone was barking out orders.

"Someone get the Carbon Dioxide in here, let's get this fire out!"

"Help me lift this beam, Jackson's caught under it."

"Tom, is the Conn still under control?"

"Leave him, he's dead!"

"Everyone out of here!"

I joined with everyone in moving the debris. The room was filling up with smoke quickly, and it was hot against my skin. But there were whimpers underneath the steel and materials, they would play a sound-track to my dreams for many years to come.

We worked solidly for hours, moving, saving. My hands were bleeding by the time I finished. Someone eventually organised a rotation, and Chakotay came and got me. Neelix had set up a meal in the mess hall, it was important that we eat.

As we walked the corridors in shock, bleeding over the carpet, I looked at Chakotay. "Oh Christ, what the hell have we got ourselves into now?"

* * *

That was a week ago now. It took us so long to find the dead, and the almost dead, that we were unprepared for the next attack. Like before, it came out of nowhere, with no sign of an advancing or retreating ship -- and no sign of an attacker. Just a series of explosions, this time taking out the holo-deck and the mess hall.

It took the crew over five hours to get everyone out. We're still trying to put things back into some semblance of order. Since then we've been attacked once more, and that was three days ago. We keep waiting for another attack -- the final one, I'm sure, because Voyager couldn't survive another hit. But it's been quiet. Tuvok suggested that perhaps we've moved out of the alien's space. That the attacks are nothing more than a defending of territory.

All we can do is hope so.

I'm standing in the Conference room now, waiting for my Command Crew to make a briefing. They come in one by one, and the exhaustion in the room is almost a real, living thing. They all survived, bar Seven, whose silicon implants caught fire in one of the blazes. No time for grief now -- dealing with one death is horrific, dealing with fifteen is too much. If we stopped to grieve now, we'd never start again, of that much I am sure.

I listen silently as reports from each department filter in. We are handling things well. B'Elanna has cut off all power to the engines -- we're sitting dead in space. It's a big chance, but it's our only hope. We haven't been attacked in three days, and if we keep going,

we can never get enough energy to properly repair the damage. And if we get hit, either way, we're gone.

We've organised sick bay, and structural repairs have started. The real problem, of course, is that the replicators are off-line -- we have to recycle the material. But then, if I've learnt one thing in having a half Starfleet, half-Maquis crew, it's that you can always make do with what you've got. Always.

The briefing finishes, and all except Chakotay leave the room. As they leave I let my head fall down onto the desk, closing my eyes for just a moment.

"I think I've died, and no one has told me." I murmured, moments later. He just grunted, and when I looked up he had followed suit, head down on the table, eyes closed. After a few moments I sighed, and pushed the chair away from the table, standing up. I stretched in silence, and saw that he was gazing at me critically.

"Kathryn? How are you?"

"I think I need to go to sick-bay." I said absently flinching as I stretched my arm.

"Why?"

"I got hit by some metal, I think. At some point." I pulled up my sleeve and showed him the cut. He took my arm and any apathy that was in the room instantly disappeared.

"Kathryn!" The tone was almost angry. "You need to get this looked at. If this turns into an infection, it could be serious."

"I'm fine." I said, tugging away my hand. He tightened his grip on it.

And then I started noticing odd things, like how warm his hands were on my arm. Like the way he breathed in sharply. I leaned in and rested my head against his shoulder.

"I'm so tired." I said softly. He stroked my hair and I sighed. "I thought we'd lost, for a while there. I thought that it'd all finally caught up with us. I thought-" The words caught in the back of my throat and I stopped.

"I know Kathryn. I thought it too."

And it felt so good to just be held by someone. To be exhausted with someone. When he spoke his chest rumbled, and I missed that in my life. He kissed me on the forehead, and I looked up and smiled.

And then I kissed him.

Looking back, I can name the factors. Shock. Exhaustion. Malnutrition. Fatigue. But the fact was, at that moment I was kissing Chakotay, and I had no intentions of ever letting go.

Except at the moment, all light in the room went out. We pulled away from each other straight away, and I slapped my comm badge.

"B'Elanna? What's going on?"

A string of Klingon expletives come back at me, and in the darkness I could hear Chakotay laughing quietly. If I could have seen him, I would have shot him a death look. Hell, I did it anyway.

"Captain, environmental controls are all over the place. I don't . . . god, I don't know what's going on."

"Fix it, B'Elanna. And keep me up to date. Janeway, out."

Silence.

"Kathryn, I-"

"-Chakotay, it's . . ."

We laughed. And when the comm badge buzzed again, we laughed in relief, I guess. At a conversation we couldn't face. I walked towards the door, twenty seconds later, my head spinning and my mind whirring in a hundred different directions.

"Kathryn?" He caught me, just before I walked through the doors.

"Yes?" I paused, looking back over my shoulder.

"Don't forget to go to sick-bay." He grinned, and I shook my head in exasperation, trying to hide the smile that spread across my face.

* * *

I walked onto the bridge a couple of hours later. I took one look at Chakotay's face and stopped dead in my tracks.

"Damn, I forgot to go to sickbay." I put my hand to my head, absent-mindedly.

"Captain....."

"I know Chakotay, first thing tomorrow morning-"

"-No." He stood up, cutting me off. "First officer's prerogative. Now. Go get it looked at. It's dangerous to let it go, when all it takes is a simple ten minutes in sick-bay." He was using that 'don't mess with me, Janeway' tone. I took one glance at him, and sighed.

"Fine. You win. Commander, you have the bridge." He started to say something, and then stopped. I don't think he expected me to comply so easily. Hell, maybe I was just sick of fighting.

"Good. Okay. Go." He said, almost pushing me into the turbolift.

"Okay, okay." I shook my head, finally feeling a smile on my lips. The turbo-lift jolted slightly as it began moving upwards. And then it jerked to a stop. Christ, this was all I needed.

"B'Elanna." Even I could hear the frustration in my voice, I was beginning to wonder exactly how long it would be before my Chief Engineer threw her comm badge into the warp core.

"I'm onto it Captain. We're having trouble with the power supply, I'm going to have to take all non-essentials off-line."

"Do it, Lieutenant."

And then I was standing in silence in the turbo-lift. And it occurred to me that this was the first time in a week that I had had a chance to just be alone. I laughed. Nowhere in my past had I imagined standing in a stalled turbo-lift just to have some 'Janeway time'.

Only in the Delta Quadrant.

I had been saying that a lot lately, I noticed.

Stranded with a half-Starfleet, half-Maquis crew? Only in the Delta Quadrant. Hold a trial between two omnipotent beings over the right to commit suicide? Only in the Delta Quadrant. De-assimilate a former human Borg into a valuable member of your crew? Only in the Delta Quadrant. Standing in a wrecked ship, running on quarter power, fifteen crewmen dead and no idea who your attackers were? Only in the damn Delta quadrant.

Kiss your first officer and then slink away like a coward?

Only in the Delta Quadrant.

I hadn't had a chance to talk to Chakotay, since that moment. God, I haven't wanted a chance to talk to him. If I'd had a moment to myself I would have closed my eyes and relived that moment in the conference room. And then only another attack would come between me and breaking down his damn door myself.

I sat down and leaned against the wall of the turbo-lift. Much longer, and I would have the chance to catch up on the week's sleep I had owing. So, of course, the moment I let my eyes close, the turbo-lift jerked to life. It was a sign . . . maybe some thoughts were better left to . . . later.

I sighed, standing up. It jerked twice more and then slid effortlessly up the decks. Ten seconds later I was walking towards sickbay. The lights on this deck were flickering, I noticed. I sighed again, wondering what the hell else could go wrong?

* * *

"What do you mean we're out of blood?"

"Just that Captain. We're out of blood. We've used up the stock we had in reserve, and of course the replicators are off line. We've been taking samples manually for the past twelve hours." The doctor in his enviable holographic status was the only one who seemed physically unaffected by the events of the past week.

"You can do that?" I asked, genuinely surprised.

"Captain, I can perform complex brain surgery to a degree of accuracy unparalleled by any organic life-form. I think a minor drawing of blood is within the realms of my capability." He said dryly.

Obviously, I had offended him.

"Alright Doctor, do what you have to." I nodded, and then pulled up my sleeve. "Can you help me with this?" He looked at the cut on my arm and picked up a med wand. Waving it absently over the wound, he continued talking.

"It's not just a matter of taking blood Captain. Today is the first day I haven't performed major surgery -- I've done more operations this week than I have the entire time I have been activated."

"I don't think I understand what you're saying." I jumped down off the bed and swung my arm a little, the skin still tight from the regeneration.

"We need more, Captain." He ran his hand through his hair -- the gesture so natural it was almost easy to forget he was a hologram. "I need to get the command staff down here -- everyone else has been through twice. I'm sorry, I tried to-" I raised my hand and cut him off.

"Doctor, you've been more than accommodating this past week. You just tell us what we have to do, and we'll be here." I waited for him to nod, and then turned away. I slapped my comm badge as I walked through the doors. No time to waste, not anymore.

"B'Elanna, I'm coming down to Engineering. Have those reports ready."

* * *

More than a few hours later, I found myself back in sick-bay. The doctor had taken me up on my offer, and I had been summoned to 'give blood'. If I had had time, I probably would have waxed lyrical about the significance of such an action. But I didn't -- I had fifteen dead, twenty sick and a ship sitting like a duck in space.

"Doctor, how long is this going to take?"

"About half an hour, Captain. Fifteen minutes to draw the blood, fifteen minutes rest. Ideally it should be a half hour but--"

"-fifteen minutes it is, then."

The doctor just smiled and brought out some equipment I had never seen before. I closed my eyes and let the fatigue wash over me. As I lay down on the bio-bed, I had to fight the urge to just close my eyes and sleep for a decade. As it was I was running on a mixture of adrenaline, fear and a coffee drunk about six days ago. Oh, I missed coffee.

"So this is what it takes to get you to rest, hey?"

I must have dozed off, because when I looked up Chakotay was lying on the bio-bed next to me.

"Chakotay." I stretched as best I could. "How long have I been sleeping?"

"Fifteen minutes. The doctor told me to let you sleep for fifteen minutes. I'm not surprised. We've both been up for . . . three days now."

"Oh, I managed to get a couple of hours . . . a while back." I laughed. "I'm not sure when."

There was a silence, and I leaned back again, closing my eyes.

"Oh Chakotay, how the hell are we going to get ourselves out of this one?"

"The same way we always do, Kathryn. My good looks, and your cunning mind." He used that serious, 'for your ears only' tone, and I burst out laughing.

"It's good to hear you laugh, Kathryn. I thought that I'd screwed up things, before."

I turned my face to look at him. "No, Chakotay. No."

He nodded, and began to say something before he stopped. We lay in silence for a while.

> <p>

"In that explosion, Chakotay, you were the first person I looked for." I said quietly, half of me hoping that he wouldn't hear.

"I know."

"You know?"

"I was looking for you at the same time."

"Oh, Chakotay."

"Let me ask you something, Kathryn?"

"Sure." I sounded more convincing than I felt, I bet.

"What happened . . . back then . . . was it a forty hours sleep deprivation thing? Or was it -- more?"

The silence lay between us. I was desperately trying to form the words in my mind -- to tell him that I cared but I couldn't care. That it was too much. That . . .

"Kathryn?"

"Yes?"

"Fifteen minutes is up. We can go."

And then he offered me a way out. And I realised that that was the way it had always been with him. Never demanding too much, never playing the point to his advantage.

And I realised that I wasn't willing to give that up. That I no longer cared if it was too much, I didn't want to let him go. I didn't want to be in an explosion and *not* have someone to look for.

I took one look at him, and smiled. I thought, after all that had happened -- between New Earth and the Borg, between Kellin and the Vori, that things could never be the same between us. And maybe they won't. But when I kissed him that day, with our clothes stinking of death and our brains working on auto-pilot, I knew that I had to give it a try. That we owe it to the dead, to live.

I held out my hand and helped him down off the bio-bed.

"You're getting old, old man." I grinned and leaned forward to plant a kiss on his lips. He looked at me in surprise, and then pulled me to him, so that we were standing in the middle of sickbay, our heads woozy and bags of our blood lying on the floor, kissing like a couple of ninth graders.

And then our comm badges buzzed and voices invaded the air. I moved away to talk, and he grabbed my hand, planting a kiss in the palm. It lay there like a promise, an idea.

A beginning.

I smiled.

End
file.